

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5180

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 5451

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LA

SUBJ: CALL ON PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA, PRIME MINISTER OF LAOS

SUMMARY. PRIME MINISTER PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA OF LAOS RECEIVED ME POLITELY FOR COURTESY CALL SEPTEMBER 2. I ASSURED HIM I WOULD DO MY BEST TO MAINTAIN BEST RELATIONS POSSIBLE IN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES AND HE WELCOMED ME AND SUGGESTED CLOSE CONTACT WITH FOREIGN MINISTRY. HE ALSO COMPLAINED THAT MY PREDECESSOR HAD ASKED HIM TO TAKE STRONG ACTION AGAINST ANTI-EMBASSY DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH GOVERNMENT COULD NOT DO AND THAT U.S. GOVERNMENT HAD FAILED TO SUPPORT HIM IN 1957 AND 1958. HE SAID IT WAS TO U.S. ADVANTAGE TO MAINTAIN EMBASSY IN LAOS ONLY ONE OF FOUR FORMER INDOCHINA STATES IN WHICH U.S. STILL REPRESENTED AND THAT LAOS WAS STILL IMPORTANT BECAUSE OF GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION AND SINO-RUSSIAN COMPETITION FOR INFLUENCE. HE INCONGRUOUSLY EXPRESSED SURPRISE THAT U.S. HAD TERMINATED ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE
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AFTER HIS GOVERNMENT ORDERED USAID OUT OF THE COUNTRY

AND I TOLD HIM TIMES WERE NOT PROPITIOUS FOR DISCUSSION OF THIS GENERAL QUESTION. I FOUND HIM LESS ROBUST THAN THREE YEARS AGO BUT IN POSSESSION OF ALL HIS FACULTIES AS WELL AS HIS CUSTOMARY PRINCELY HAUTEUR, DESPITE FACT HE IS NOW MORE OF A DISTINGUISHED PERSONAGE THAN AN ACTUAL HEAD OF GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA, PRIME MINISTER OF LAOS, RECEIVED ME FOR INITIAL COURTESY CALL SEPTEMBER 2. HE WAS POLITE, CORRECT AND DISMISSED ME AFTER PRECISELY TEN MINUTES.

2. I TOLD HIM AS I HAD TOLD PHOUNE SIPASEUTH, DELEGATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, THAT I WAS HAPPY TO BE BACK IN VIENTIANE, AND THAT ALTHOUGH THE WORLD HAD CHANGED A LOT AND ALTHOUGH I WELL UNDERSTOOD THERE WERE AN WOULD BE PROBLEMS BETWEEN OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS, I WOULD DO MY BEST TO MAINTAIN THE BEST RELATIONS POSSIBLE IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, INFORMING HIS GOVERNMENT FRANKLY OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S VIEWS AND FAITHFULLY REPORTING THE VIEWS OF HIS GOVERNMENT. HE WELCOMED ME AND SUGGESTED I KEEP IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, NOTABLY WITH NAKKHALA SOUVANNAVONG WHOM I HAD KNOWN A LONG TIME.

3. SOUVANNA ALSO WENT INTO A MILD DIATRIBE AGAINST MY PREDECESSOR FOR HAVING REQUESTED FIRM ACTION AGAINST ANTI-EMBASSY DEMONSTRATORS WHICH THE GOVERNMENT WAS NOT CAPABLE OF TAKING AND AGAINST THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT FOR NOT HAVING SUPPORT HIM IN 1957 AND 1958. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT IT WAS TO THE UNITED STATES'S ADVANTAGE TO RETAIN AN EMBASSY IN LAOS, THE ONLY ONE OF THE FOUR FORMER INDOCHINA STATES IN WHICH IT NOW HAD SUCH REPRESENTATION. LAOS WAS STILL IMPORTANT BECAUSE OF ITS STRATEGIC GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION AND WAS NOW THE SCENE OF COMPETITION BETWEEN THE RUSSIANS WHO WERE GIVING AID IN THE SOUTH AND THE CHINESE WHO WERE BUILDING A NEW TOWN OUTSIDE LUANG PRABANG. OF COURSE, REPORTS IN THE THAI PRESS ABOUT 1,500 RUSSIANS IN LAOS WERE NONSENSE.

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4. SOUVANNA SAID ALL THE CURRENT PROBLEMS BETWEEN LAOS AND THE UNITED STATES STEMMED FROM DETAILS OF WHAT HAD BELONGED TO USAID AND WHAT HAD BELONGED TO THE EMBASSY AND HE HOPED THAT THESE MATTERS COULD BE THRASHED OUT AS DETAILS. HE ADDED, RATHER INCONGRUOUSLY, THAT HE HAD BEEN SURPRISED BY THE REACTION OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT AND THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS IN REGARD TO

LAOS. HE HAD NOT EXPECTED THAT AID WOULD BE TERMINATED JUST BECAUSE USAID HAD LEFT. THERE WERE MANY PROJECTS LIKE THE HOSPITAL THAT COULD HAVE BEEN COMPLETED AND PEOPLE ASSIGNED TO THE EMBASSY STAFF COULD HAVE OVERSEEN THIS WORK IN LIEU OF USAID. I SAID THAT CERTAIN FACTS IMPEDED ANY DISCUSSION OF THIS GENERAL QUESTION. USAID HAD GONE AT PGNU REQUEST AND PROVISIONS OF AMERICAN LAW WERE GOVERNING FACTORS IN THE NEW SITUATION; WE HAD A NUMBER OF VESTIGIAL USAID/RELATED MATTERS UNDER CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY; FRANKLY I THOUGHT THE TIMES WERE NOT PROPITIOUS RIGHT NOW FOR ANY GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THIS SORT ALTHOUGH I WOULD REPORT ANYTHING SPECIFIC HIS GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATED TO ME.

5. COMMENT: SOUVANNA PHOUMA, ALTHOUGH LESS ROBUST THAN WHEN I SAW HIM LATE IN 1972, IS OBVIOUSLY IN POSSESSION OF ALL HIS FACULTIES AND NOT SUFFERING FROM ANY NOTICEABLE PHYSICAL DISABILITY. HE IS ALSO IN FULL POSSESSION OF HIS CUSTOMARY PRINCELY HAUTEUR AND PRESENCE AND SEEMS TO BE COPING WITH THE FACT THAT HE IS NOW MORE OF A DISTINGUISHED PERSONAGE THAN AN ACTUAL HEAD OF GOVERNMENT IN ANY REAL SENSE.
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